

Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea

Implementing Legislation

There is no implementing legislation for the Convention.

Parties

Japan, People's Republic of China (China), Republic of Korea (Korea), Republic of Poland (Poland), Russian Federation, and the United States.

Description

A. Mission/Purpose:

The objectives of the Convention are:

- "1. to establish an international regime for conservation, management, and optimum utilization of pollock resources in the Convention Area [the high seas area of the Bering Sea beyond the U.S. and Russian 200-mile jurisdictions];
2. to restore and maintain pollock resources in the Bering Sea at levels which will permit their maximum sustainable yield;
3. to cooperate in the gathering and examining of factual information concerning pollock and other living marine resources in the Bering Sea; and
4. to provide, if the Parties agree, a forum in which to consider the establishment of necessary conservation and management measures for other living marine resources in the Convention Area as may be required in the future."

B. Organizational Structure:

The Convention does not provide for a commission. It does, however, specify that Parties will convene an Annual Conference and establish a Scientific and Technical (S&T) Committee. The functions of the Annual Conference are, among other things, to establish an annual allowable harvest level (AHL) for pollock in the Convention Area, establish an annual individual national pollock quota (INQ) for each Party, adopt appropriate pollock conservation and management measures, establish a Plan of Work for the S&T Committee, and discuss cooperative enforcement measures and receive enforcement reports from each Party. Parties may also use the Annual Conference to determine the scope of any cooperative scientific research on, and conservation and management measures for, living marine resources other than pollock covered by the Convention.

The S&T Committee has the charge to "compile, exchange, and analyze information on fisheries harvests, fish stocks, and other living marine resources covered by this Convention in accordance with the Plan of Work established by the Annual Conference, and shall investigate other scientific matters as may be referred to it by the Annual Conference." The S&T Committee also makes recommendations to the Annual Conference regarding the conservation and management of pollock, including the AHL.

C. Advisory Body:

No formal U.S. advisory body has been legislated for the Convention. However, the U.S. Department of State has invited the 12-member "North Pacific and Bering Sea Fisheries Advisory Body," appointed to advise the U.S. Representative to the U.S.-Russia Intergovernmental Consultative Committee (ICC), to serve informally as the advisory body. This group consists of the following individuals:

- The Director of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife of the State of Washington;
- The Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game of the State of Alaska;
- Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of 10 nominees provided by the Governor of Alaska; and,
- Five members appointed by the Secretary of State from a list of 10 nominees provided by the Governor of Washington.

D. Background:

The development in the mid-to-late 1980s of an extensive pollock fishery in the central Bering Sea area of the Aleutian Basin, beyond the U.S. and Russian 200-mile zones, was of great concern to U.S. and Russian fishing interests. The United States closed a domestic fishery as a result of the adverse impact this unregulated fishery was having on U.S. pollock stocks. Concern also extended to bycatch problems associated with the fishery.

The central Bering Sea pollock fishery was conducted by trawl vessels from China, Japan, Korea, Poland, and the former Soviet Union. Catch data submitted by these countries indicated that annual harvests in the area rose to approximately 1.5 million metric tons (t) in the years leading up to 1989. Largely due to drastic declines in catch and catch-per-unit-effort, leading to a total catch of under 300,000 t in 1991 and only 10,000 t in 1992, the governments involved agreed to a voluntary suspension of fishing in the area for 1993-94. During the 2-year suspension of fishing, an agreed scientific monitoring program was carried out that showed no evidence of the recovery of the resource.

On February 11, 1994, after 3 years of negotiations, the Parties initialed the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the central Bering Sea. Its major principles include: no fishing permitted in the Convention area unless the biomass of the Aleutian Basin stock exceeds a threshold of 1.67 million t (if the parties cannot agree on an estimate of the biomass, the estimate of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center and its Russian counterpart will be used); allocation procedures; 100 percent observer and satellite transmitter coverage; and prior notification of entry into the Convention area and of transshipment activities.

On June 16, 1994, the Convention was signed by China, Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United States. Japan and Poland signed it on August 4, 1994, and August 25, 1994, respectively. The Convention entered into force on December 8, 1995, for Russia, Poland, China, and the United States, on December 21, 1995, for Japan, and on January 4, 1996, for Korea.

Current Status

The 12th Annual Conference of the Parties to the Convention took place September 4-6, 2007, in Beijing, China. Delegations from the United States, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Poland, and Russia met to exchange scientific information on the latest status of pollock stocks in the Convention Area and to consider the establishment of an annual harvest level for pollock in the Convention Area. The Conference was chaired by Mr. Zhou Yingqi, Professor, Shanghai Fisheries University. Mr. Doug Mecum, Acting Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service Alaska Region, led the U.S. delegation. Included on the U.S. delegation were members of the U.S. fishing industry advisory group, and representatives of the Department of State, NOAA, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

The major functions of the Annual Conference are, among other things, to establish an allowable commercial harvest level (AHL) for pollock in the central Bering Sea for the following year, establish an annual individual national pollock quota (INQ) for each Party, establish a Plan of Work for the S&T Committee, and adopt appropriate pollock conservation and management measures for the Convention area.

2008 AHL and INQs: The pollock biomass for the Convention area was estimated at 486,667 t, based on the premise that the Bogoslof Island pollock spawning stock biomass (292,000 t) is equal to 60 percent of the biomass in the Convention Area. The Parties agreed that there was insufficient scientific and technical information to determine the pollock biomass of the whole Aleutian Basin and that the estimated biomass for the Convention Area is nowhere near the biomass target (1.67 million t) stated in the Convention necessary to trigger a commercial fishery. Consequently, the AHL was set at zero during the Conference and the 14-year moratorium on pollock fishing in the Central Bering Sea was continued, despite the desire by Japan, Korea, and Poland for a small AHL. All Parties expressed concern that pollock stocks do not seem to be recovering even after 14 years of a fishing moratorium. 2008 will mark the 15th year of a moratorium on commercial pollock fishing in the central Bering Sea.

Trial Fishing: Korea presented final results from 2006 trial fishing and preliminary results from the 2007 trial fishing. The Korean representative reported that, for 2007, two vessels spent 20 days (July 26–August 14) in the Central Bering Sea area, conducted 40 trawl hauls, and landed a total of 2 pollock. None of the other Parties conducted trial fishing in 2007.

The Parties agreed to roll over the terms and conditions for trial fishing adopted in 1999 for 2008. Korea plans to conduct trial fishing with two vessels in 2008. Japan may possibly conduct trial fishing in 2008 after reviewing available scientific information.

Work Plan for the S&T Committee: The Parties agreed to continue cooperative research efforts to determine the causes of continued low pollock stock levels in the Convention Area, and to continue with plans to convene a workshop on pollock stock genetics at some point in the future. The U.S. Party reminded the other parties that the United States would not be conducting a Bogoslof Island area survey in 2008 and welcomed other parties to conduct this survey. Unfortunately, none of the other Parties have the resources to do this in 2008. The United States will conduct the survey in 2009.

Enforcement: The Parties did not observe any unauthorized pollock fishing in the Convention Area in 2007.

Transparency: The Parties agreed to the same interim observer rules for 2008 that have been employed since 1998. These rules do not address attendance by non-governmental observers--only observers from regional and intergovernmental organizations.

Future Meetings: Russia agreed to host the 13th Annual Conference of the Parties in Russia, possibly Kaliningrad, in early September 2008. The United States will host the 14th Annual Conference in 2009.

The NMFS Alaska Fisheries Science Center has made the 1994-2007 reports of the Annual Conference and the S&T Committee available on the internet at <http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/refm/cbs/>.

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